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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000856

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KTIP](#) [BK](#) [SR](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: LARGE TRAFFICKING RING OF BOSNIAN  
SERBS DISCOVERED

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Robert Garverick, Reasons 1  
.4 b and d.

11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 28 poloff and OSCE were introduced by a local NGO to a house full of victims of trafficking for labor exploitation. There are about 346 Bosnian Serb men who were brought over the last six months to Azerbaijan to work on construction projects. According to their stories, a Serbian company call SerbAz brought them to Azerbaijan, although there is evidence linking this company to Azerbaijan's Ministry of Youth and Sports. Their living conditions are very poor, and they have not been paid for five months of labor. Passports reportedly have been confiscated. OSCE is leading the humanitarian effort to help these victims and the diplomatic effort to ensure the GOAJ investigates and prosecutes the case. Embassy confirmed with Ministry of Internal Affairs that they are investigating the case, and will support OSCE as needed. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On October 28 poloff, along with representatives of the OSCE, was taken by a local NGO, Azerbaijan Migration Center, to a residence being used to house 71 victims of trafficking for labor exploitation. In conversations with the victims, poloff learned that they are largely Bosnian Serbs, although there may be some Serbian citizens in the group as well. There are four other residences being used to house these victims, for a total of 346 people. There are approximately 150 more victims housed in Mingachevir, a city northwest of Baku. The victims say there were 700 victims at one point, although they have started to be sent back to Bosnia in small groups.

13. (C) Through conversations with the two de facto leaders of the group of victims, Sasha Krivoslje and Sinise Novakovic, along with supplemental information from the Azerbaijan Migration Center (AMC), who discovered the group one week ago and has been trying to help them since, poloff was able to put together some information about their situation. They were recruited in Bosnia (Republika Srpska) by a company called SerbAz that promised them a sliding scale of payment of five to seven USD per hour to work on construction projects in Azerbaijan. One of the recruiters is named Miroslav Vucenovic. They paid themselves for a bus ticket to Belgrade, and 250 euros (370 USD) to the company for facilitating the trip. They were then put on a plane from Belgrade to Baku, and bought tourist visas upon arrival at the Baku Airport. In the airport they were met by a Bosnian Serb named Sasha Lipovac, who took their passports and dropped them off at one of the housing locations. The

victims seem mostly to have arrived in Azerbaijan between April and June.

¶4. (C) Conditions in the house are extremely poor. There are bunk beds squished into every corner of the house, with 10 to 25 men living in each room. There is only one bathroom with no hot water. The kitchen is tiny and has no potable water. There is clear evidence of organization however, as each person's name is written on his bunk and on the small cabinet where he can keep his belongings. OSCE representatives confirm that conditions in the other houses are if anything worse than the one poloff visited.

¶5. (C) The Bosnians were bused from the houses to one of five work sites every day. One of the work sites may have been Buta Palas, a large convention center used by the GOAJ for official events. In Mingachevir, the site was the Mingachevir Olympic Center, run by the GOAJ. There were taken at 5am, given some breakfast at their work site, and then worked from 7am to 7pm. They were bused directly home from work. They were told they needed passes from the company to leave their houses, and not to talk to anyone. Any violations of the rules would result in fines deducted from their paychecks.

¶6. (C) However, the promised payment for hours work never materialized. Some victims reported receiving 100 USD for their first month, only a fraction of what they were due, then nothing else. The men are currently not working, although it is unclear when they stopped working and how that was decision was made. They are all asking for compensation

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from the company and their passports and tickets back to Bosnia. Every few days a group of 8 to 15 people are called to the SerbAz office, reportedly located in the same building as the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The men are given a small portion of the wages due them, then driven to the airport and put on a plane back to Bosnia. Krivoslje was offered this deal, but he wants to stay in Baku until all the men are freed. He took the money, but the SerbAz officer, who Krivoslje believes works at the Ministry of Youth and Sport, refused to give him his passport until they were at the airport. Krivoslje refused this deal, and was threatened by the official.

¶7. (C) While Bosnia and Herzegovina has no diplomatic representation in Azerbaijan, the victims managed to contact their consul in Turkey, Brane Pecanac. Pecanac came to Azerbaijan for three days (date of visit unclear) and met with SerbAz and the victims. At the end of the visit, Pecanac told the victims that everything was fine and their passports were safe. The victims are no extremely angry that their consul would not help them.

#### Aid to the Victims

¶8. (C) AMC has distributed a short questionnaire to all of the victims in order to collect basic evidence on each of their cases. They ave also provided some potable water and medicalcare. Victims say that two men have already died of heart attacks while at the house, and a third one was very sick and finally sent back to Bosnia where he died six days later. OSCE is beginning to provide food aid, and is taking the lead on diplomatic approaches to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Internal Affairs to urge them to investigate and prosecute this case.

#### Embassy Actions

Poloff spoke with deputy head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Anti-Trafficking Department Imran Najafov, who said they were informed of the case today by AMC. Once AMC sends its written appeal, which they will do in the next day,

Azerbaijan's new National Referral Mechanism is triggered. Najafov promised to handle the case appropriately. Najafov called poloff back to say that he had spoken to Deputy Minister and national coordinator for anti-trafficking issues Vilayat Eyvazov, and Eyvazov wanted to convey to poloff "his word" that the case would be handled correctly.  
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